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## ABSTRACT

Research and practice in deafness rehabilitation show that evaluation services for severely disabled deaf clients can best be provided within a "total adjustment environment" which incorporates a number of special program considerations associated with the evaluation of deaf clients. Four of these considerations are (1) a rehabilitation evaluation workshop as the appropriate setting, (2) communication skills of the evaluator, (3) knowledge of deafness on the part of the evaluator, and (4) integration of adjustment services into the vocational evaluation process. A modification of Nadolsky's model of vocational evaluation is recommended which makes more explicit a communication base and social and work adjustment services. The model conceptualizes vocational assessment as a continuous process leading to employment or improved adjustment. Visual presentation of the model is a pyramid moving upward toward narrowing of vocational choice. Steps from bottom to top are biographical data, evaluation interview, psychological tests, occupational information and exploration, work samples, situational or workshop tasks, informal staff conference, job tryout, formal staff conference, and vocational counseling. (JT)

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VOCATIONAL EVALUATION OF SEVERELY DISABLED DEAF CLIENTS

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Vocational Evaluation of  
Severely Disabled Deaf Clients

BY Douglas Watson, Ph.D.

Meaningful and appropriate vocational evaluation of deaf clients requires more than simple physical integration into existing evaluation programs. Rehabilitation psychologists planning evaluation services for deaf clients, especially severely disabled clients who have other disabilities in addition to deafness, will need to be aware of and provide for a number of unique service needs presented by these clients.

Careful analysis shows that although the objectives and process of vocational evaluation with deaf clients is comparable to those for other client groups, the communication and knowledge requirements associated with deafness do in fact require modifications in instrumentation, techniques, and procedures used in the evaluation process.

The purpose of this presentation is to briefly review recommended guidelines which rehabilitation psychologists, evaluators, and counselors can utilize to guide their efforts in the vocational evaluation of deaf clients.

MODEL

Research and practice in deafness rehabilitation show that evaluation services for severely disabled deaf clients can best be provided within a "total adjustment environment" which incorporates a number of special program considerations associated with the evaluation of deaf clients. Four of these considerations will be presented here:

1. The Rehabilitation Evaluation Workshop
2. Communication Skills of the Evaluator
3. Evaluation Staff's knowledge of deafness
4. Integration of Adjustment Services into the V-E process

The Rehabilitation Evaluation Workshop-- particularly those programs which supplement standardized testing with evaluation of client performance in real or simulated work situations, appear to be the most productive setting for evaluation of severely disabled deaf clients. The success of this approach appears to lie in the concrete, performance-based nature of workshop tasks which makes it possible to evaluate those clients whose communication and experiential deprivations often preclude any attempts at standardized testing. In addition, the evaluation workshop setting can provide the "face validity" and concrete "encounter" with the work world which is not otherwise available to many of these clients. A third advantage is the opportunities the workshop provides for acquisition of occupational information and exploration by the client as she/he works on various job tasks. This first-hand encounter with a sample of an actual job is not available in most other evaluation procedures.

Communication Skills of the Evaluator--

The second consideration is that of effective communication between the evaluator and client. Communication problems represent a fundamental barrier which prevents many otherwise skilled evaluators from serving deaf clients. The problem is not simply that of acquiring basic manual communication skills, but of developing a level of facility and skill that permits ready interaction even with clients who present difficult communication problems. Rehabilitation psychologists should be cognizant of this requirement and actively initiate steps to ensure that effective evaluator-client communication is achieved and maintained.

### Knowledge of Deafness--

In addition to skills in manual communication, vocational evaluation of deaf clients requires that the evaluator have an extensive and in-depth knowledge of deafness. The evaluator planning to work with deaf persons needs to become thoroughly familiar with the life experiences and achievements of the deaf community and its various sub-groups. Especially as "understanding a client usually precedes assisting him." This knowledge and understanding is particularly critical in evaluation of a client's interests, abilities, life experiences, and aspirations-- toward determining his vocational potential.

Vocational evaluation of any client group requires, for that matter, a broad comprehensive knowledge and understanding of human behavior dynamics and individual differences. Deafness, however, imposes additional considerations. The client-evaluator interaction matrix will require the evaluator to possess not only a broad general knowledge base, but also knowledge of how deafness influences and interacts with those universal human dynamics.

Integration of Adjustment Services into the Vocational evaluation process- is the fourth major requirement we will consider. Research indicates that: deficiencies in the critical competency areas of personal-social adjustment will frequently interfere with and even preclude valid vocational evaluation of severely disabled deaf clients in the traditional sense. Instead, these clients are better served by programs which integrate personal, social, and work adjustment services into the evaluation process. Best provided in a rehabilitation evaluation workshop setting, such services should be built into the evaluation system:

Standardized psychometric testing, for example, may indicate no definable vocational potential, whereas the client's progress in concurrent adjustment training and assessment may demonstrate behavioral changes in terms of improved adjustment.

#### PROPOSED MODEL

The process of evaluation recommended then may be viewed as that which was best described by Nadolsky (1971) which conceptualizes vocational assessment as a continuous process leading to placement of the individual client in a suitable occupation. However, the special program considerations associated with evaluation of deaf persons (e.g., the evaluation setting, communication, knowledge of deafness, and adjustment services) present a number of considerations not inherent in the general model. To incorporate these special program considerations, implicit assumptions in the general model of evaluation must be made explicit in the vocational evaluation of deaf clients. We recommend modification of the Nadolsky model in order to incorporate and make explicit (1) a communication base, (2) social adjustment services, and (3) work adjustment services. This "total adjustment" environment is seen as the necessary parameters within which satisfactory vocational assessment of deaf persons can obtain. Figure 1 presents Nadolsky's model of vocational evaluation (solid pyramid) as modified (broken line pyramid) for evaluation of deaf persons.

The basis for this modification is inherent in the profound effects deafness has on the deaf individual's ability to transact with his social, work, and communication environments. In effect, assumptions about the evaluation setting and client-environmental transactions which are normally assumed, do not hold when the client is a deaf individual. These fundamental differences must be accommodated in the vocational evaluation of deaf clients.

The pyramid shape of Figure 1 indicates that the goal of evaluation is to determine appropriate outcomes for the client, whether employment or improved adjustment. A logical narrowing of vocational choice occurs as the evaluation process contributes to increased client awareness of his actual capacity to participate in the world of work (Nadolsky, 1971). Each phrase of the process is conceptualized as using various tools and techniques to facilitate and enhance client movement toward occupational determination.

Modifications in the model (broken-line pyramid) indicates the basic and necessary adjustment environment which must be present in services to deaf persons. Effective client-evaluator communication comprises the foundation. Lacking communication, the "bottom" literally "falls out" and appropriate evaluation services are not obtainable.

Provided with a sound communication foundation, effective social and work adjustment services can be incorporated to facilitate client adjustment. More than ancillary services, the objective is to provide the total adjustment environment within which deaf clients can best be evaluated and rehabilitated. Improved client adjustment is seen as directly related to increased client vocational awareness and capacity to participate in the world of work. This process is conceptualized in Figure 1 as moving up the social and work adjustment scale toward an exit from the evaluation process to a level commensurate with the individual's optimal functional outcome.

Subsequent discussion related to these guidelines, although presenting specific evaluation techniques and principles for selected phases of the vocational evaluation process, are predicated upon the "total adjustment

environment" portrayed in Figure 1. Optimal vocational evaluation services for deaf clients would suggest that every test, clinical observation, behavioral rating, and situational or job try-out results, should ideally evolve within the parameters of the proposed model. To the extent a program lacks these critical elements, we encourage that program to actively pursue their development.

Figure 1  
Model for Vocational Evaluation of  
Severely Disabled Deaf Persons

